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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ALGIERS 000234

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KISL](#) [AG](#)

SUBJECT: ISLAMIST LEADER BEARISH ON PEACE PROCESS

REF: SECSTATE 20919

Classified By: Ambassador David D. Pearce; reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Ruling coalition Movement for a Society of Peace (MSP) president Aboudjerra Soltani told the Ambassador on March 4 that he was pessimistic regarding an Israeli-Palestinian peace agreement and did not believe "the opportunity was present" right now. Despite his pessimism and initial insistence that the full responsibility for bringing peace to the region lay with the U.S., Soltani did concede that dialogue was important, and that pressure was needed to promote Palestinian reconciliation. The MSP (Muslim Brotherhood) represents the official face of political Islam in Algeria, and Soltani in particular has been in contact with Hamas leaders such as Khaled Meshaal. He recently returned from a visit to Damascus during which he invited Meshaal to visit Algeria. Per reftel, Ambassador took the opportunity of an introductory call on Soltani to press for Soltani's help in working with the Syrians and Palestinians alike to achieve Palestinian reconciliation and persuade Hamas to renounce violence, abide by existing agreements and recognize Israel, their interlocutor. END SUMMARY.

FROM ONE HAMAS TO ANOTHER

¶2. (C) Soltani, whose party is also known within Algeria as Hamas, visited Damascus in February, where he met with Palestinian Hamas leader Khaled Meshaal as well as senior officials in the Syrian government. Soltani told the Ambassador it was a positive visit, although he felt that the apparent right-wing victory in the Israeli elections was not a good sign for the region as a whole. Ambassador responded by saying that, whatever the Israeli government or the problems on the Palestinian side, there was an urgent need to address the issue. With regard to Hamas, the essentials were three: rejection of violence (as Soltani's party had done in Algeria), respect for existing agreements, and recognition of Israel. Soltani listened and asked what conditions would be placed on Israel, asserting that virtually the entire responsibility for ending the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lay with the U.S. Ambassador pointed out that the Obama administration had made the conflict a matter of priority attention immediately after taking office in January, and the appointment of special envoy George Mitchell was an important step. But while the U.S. intended to do its part, other powers in the region also had a responsibility to help - e.g. in working with the Palestinians - and Algeria's voice could be very important in this regard.

FINDING HOPE IN MITCHELL

13. (C) Soltani's chief of staff, Nouredine Ait Messaoudene, said that no solution would be possible without including Hamas in the negotiating process, adding that Mitchell in Northern Ireland had stressed the "importance of opening dialogue with the party causing the most problems." The price of not talking to Hamas, Soltani added, was continued violence. He acknowledged that Hamas had provoked the December and January violence in Gaza, but said the Israeli response was disproportionate. "I am not a weapons expert," Soltani said, "but using aircraft and white phosphorous was excessive." The Ambassador reiterated the need for Hamas to renounce violence - as Soltani's own party had - and accept the three basic conditions. Otherwise, Hamas will have been rewarded for resorting to violence.

COMMENT

14. (C) Soltani's MSP, by definition of its integration into Algeria's ruling coalition, represents a moderate anti-extremist brand of political Islam that is highly credible around the region, given the MSP's Muslim Brotherhood ties. We believe it is also the part of the Algerian government that has the most regular and working-level contact with Hamas and the Syrian government, among others. Ambassador used the meeting with Soltani to press Soltani on the need for Algeria to use its influence positively, including with Hamas. For all his bluster about U.S. responsibility in resolving the Palestinian-Israeli conundrum, Soltani was obviously pleased that the new U.S. administration was re-examining its policy on a number of

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fronts. He cited in particular President Obama's inaugural address as a hopeful sign for the future of renewed dialogue between the U.S. and Syria.

PEARCE